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The Baltimore Sun

December 6, 1996, Friday, FINAL EDITION

SECTION: LOCAL (NEWS), Pg. 1B

LENGTH: 629 words

HEADLINE: Sen. Pica expected to leave Assembly; He won't confirm, deny, but plans announcement

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BODY:

State Sen. John A. Pica Jr., who has represented Northeast Baltimore in the Maryland General Assembly since 1979, is expected to announce next week that he will resign his Senate seat Jan. 1, according to sources familiar with his decision.

Pica, 44, the Senate deputy majority leader who also heads the city's delegation to the upper chamber, would not confirm the reports yesterday -- but would not deny them either.

"I'll have an announcement Monday, and if I [resign] then, I'll do it with my family by my side," he said. "If such a thing were to occur, my colleagues would expect me to tell them first."

While Pica has quietly told some legislators and others that he is leaving the Senate, he is expected tell most of his fellow senators Monday, at a leadership meeting in Annapolis scheduled to discuss the next session of the legislature.

Later Monday, he is expected to call a news conference in Baltimore -- probably at his home in Homeland -- to formally announce the resignation.

Although news of his leaving is expected to surprise many, some Senate colleagues and others say that since his re-election in 1994, Pica has increasingly complained about the rigors of the schedule and the pressures on his family.

At his announcement, he is expected to say that he wants to devote more time to his career as a lawyer in the law firm of Orioles owner Peter G. Angelos and to spend more time with his family, sources said.

Sources also said he has talked with Mayor Kurt L. Schmoke about being a contractually paid lobbyist to represent the city in Annapolis, though it was unclear yesterday whether a deal has been struck.

Asked about that, Pica said, "The city's been my main priority as a senator, and if there's any way to help Baltimore, I'm going to find a way to do it."

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Asked if he had talked to Schmoke about such a job, he said, "I did discuss helping the city this session with the mayor." He declined to comment further.

Former members of the General Assembly are prohibited from being lobbyists for one legislative session after their departures, under a law passed in 1995. They are permitted, however, to lobby on behalf of government entities without the so-called "cooling-off" period.

Three members of the House of Delegates from Northeast Baltimore's 43rd District may be interested in stepping up to the Senate -- Del. Gerald J. Curran, Del. Ann Marie Doory and Del. Kenneth C. Montague Jr.

But sources said 3rd District City Councilwoman Joan Carter Conway has the inside track.

Conway, who was elected to the council last year, ran unsuccessfully for the House of Delegates on Pica's ticket in 1994 and is said to be close to the senator. She ran fourth that year behind the three incumbents.

Pica controls at least three of the five votes on the 43rd District's Democratic State Central Committee, which will recommend his replacement to Gov. Parris N. Glendening.

In the case of legislative vacancies, the governor technically appoints the new member.

If Conway makes the move to Annapolis, political insiders said at least two members of the central committee probably would be interested in her council seat -- Rita R. Church, a community activist from the Coldstream-Homestead-Montebello area, and Sylvia Williams, an activist from Northwood.

The decision on a successor to Conway, however, would be up to the City Council.

Pica, an influential member of the Senate who sits on the Finance Committee, is the Senate chairman of the Joint Administrative, Executive and Legislative Review Committee.

He was elected to the House of Delegates in 1978 and served one term before running for the Senate in 1982, succeeding J. Joseph Curran Jr., now Maryland's attorney general.

Pub Date: 12/06/96

GRAPHIC: PHOTO, SUN STAFF: 1995, Leaving?: Sen. John A. Pica Jr. has represented the city since '79.

LOAD-DATE: December 8, 1996